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**Manual of history and spirituality  
of the Order of Clerics Regular  
of St. Paul Beheaded**

# Chapter 19

## **The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception And Cardinal Lambruschini**

### **“That’s Lambruschini”**

“And now I want to introduce a Roman personality, who is exposed stiff and dead on his ceremonial bed in the midst of burning torches, contemplated with an open-mouth by a numerous crowd, especially of the common people who did not dare to raise their eyes to him while he was alive, and with a timid and respectful gesture took off the hat when he passed in his gala carriage. He was a cardinal, now lying in a hall of the palace of the Consulta, lying on the bier, covered with his red princely robes... A man who ruled the Roman State, and whose name was attached to the biggest events in modern history... The massive marble head, with few white hairs; his features show an iron will and tranquil resignation. The papal tiara was almost put on his head in 1846... When Gregory XVI died, no one doubted about the election as supreme pontiff of this renowned statesman, Minister of Gregory, Archbishop of Genoa, Grand Prior of Malta, Abbot of Farfa, former papal nuncio in Paris; many cardinals were his creatures, his party in Rome was extensive and powerful...”

“A priest who had knocked on his door in Genoa, asking protection and support, the poor Count Mastai Ferretti, obtained the papal tiara, and the old Lambruschini had to kneel before him and kiss the feet of his Holiness the Pope (Pius IX). Now here is exposed Lambruschini, the haughty, inflexible Genoese, who had never given in to anyone, who reigned for Gregory: a man of great energy, despotic nature, of a monastic rigor, inaccessible to all human passions, concerned solely with the dominion of the Church, one of the few survivors of the old days, of the old school. He saw five popes on the chair of St. Peter, the sixth took away his tiara. To which solemn event had he not witnessed from the French Revolution to that of Rome of 1848! How many people, kings, emperors, princes, ruling or overthrown, did he not know! Aged in the cult of theocracy, tireless promoter of absolutism of the Church, he had to see the last revolution that Pius IX himself had provoked with the reforms; decrepit, on edge of the grave, he had to flee from Rome as a criminal. I had seen him many times in the solemnities of the Church, slumped over with age, bent, trembling and dignified as an ancient patriarch, vacillating follow the procession, then enter the Sistine Chapel. All eyes were turned upon him, and the crowd murmured ‘that’s Lambruschini’.”

This is how Gregorovius was been able to give us a feeling of the greatness of our cardinal. Luigi Lambruschini (1776-1854) was a Barnabite who possessed all the characteristics of the man of government at the service of the Church. With him, in fact, and Cardinal Bilio, our Congregation records the most fruitful encounter with the Holy See, in a busy and active collaboration. We can say that Lambruschini and Bilio fit in a decisive manner in the preparation and implementation of the most salient moments of the Church of the 800’s, especially in the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the celebration of the Vatican Council I.

Cardinal Lambruschini - as Father General Felice Fioretti affirms in a circular letter of March 25, 1905 - seems to have been interested in both of these events, although in a more

clear and decisive way his work is linked to the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Actually it is significant to note that the activity of Lambruschini in this sense is the culmination of a movement that was not only alive in the Church in general, but was also present in our Congregation.

### **The “Immaculate” movement in the Church**

During the pontificate of Gregory XVI the “Immaculate” movement, which had registered a setback at the beginning of the century, gets strong and expands, and through a series of liturgical or disciplinary statements and concessions, the prospect of a dogmatic proclamation of the Immaculate Conception takes shape. Here are some events.

In the field of piety, the apparitions of Mary to St. Catherine Labouré and the spread worldwide of the Miraculous Medal, contributed considerably to the devotion toward Mary “conceived without sin” (1830).

In honor of the Immaculate is simultaneously established in Avignon the practice of the living rosary, approved by Pope Gregory XVI in 1830.

Also flourished at that time a number of liturgical initiatives in honor of the Immaculate. In 1834, more than four hundred petitions by bishops, priests, religious superiors were addressed to the Holy See for permission to include in the preface for the feast of the “Immaculate Conception” the appellative “immaculate” after the words “*et in conceptione*.” The prayers were answered, as well as the request, forwarded also during the pontificate of Gregory XVI, to introduce in the Litany of Loreto the invocation “*Regina sine labe originali concepta*.”

### **In our Congregation**

The “Immaculate” movement in our Congregation looks like a chorus of theologians in unanimous agreement in favor of the proclamation of the dogma. In our archives there is a whole series of manuscripts that testify the industrious scholarship of our theologians in this field.

Of some interest is a voluminous work by Father Danielli of Fossombrone, where with philosophy, moral, doctrinal and legal reasons, “...it leads to the upcoming definability of what is disputable around this subject.”

It's not just a curiosity to recall the “anagram *purissimum*” with which Fr. Danielli closes the final dedication of his manuscript:

Mary, “fecundata salutata, praeservata, praelecta,  
accipit (ab angelo): “Ave Maria gratia plena, Dominus tecum”;  
reddit: “Deipara inventa, sum ergo Immaculata;

Mary, fertilized, greeted, preserved, elected, received (from the angel): “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you”, translated: “Found to be the Mother of God, then I am immaculate.”

This verse, besides manifesting a certain mentality and a certain style of research, actually emphasizes the basic issue of Mary as immaculate, that is, her divine motherhood.

In the *Commentariolum* in the *De gratia* treatise, drawn up by Cardinal Gerdil, we are faced with a conclusion of this kind: “*Refugit mens pia* to think that, even for an instant was going to be slave of original sin the one who was going to crush the head of the snake.”

Cardinal Gerdil declares then with conviction that the Immaculate Conception of Mary is “*accomodatissima et probatissima sententia*.”

But the “Duns Scotus of the Barnabites” and “doctor of the Immaculate” is Father Aimone Corio (1606-1679). These titles have been attributed to him after recent careful studies of his monumental work “*Commentaries on the Pentateuch*.” In the large commentary on verse 10 of chapter 16 of Exodus a treatise designed to show the Immaculate Conception of Mary has been discovered.

Even for Father Corio the immaculate Mary is related to her divine motherhood. He writes: “*Quidquid de puritate istius maternitatis dixeris, de Illius Conceptionis Immaculatae candor arguas ratiocinandum*; what is said about the purity of her maternity, let us argue in favor of the immaculate conception (of Mary).”

We recall also the *Cursus theologicus* by Father Maderni, which imposes itself upon our attention, especially with an almost canonical style, affirming the purity of the Virgin. He dedicates to the theme only four lines, but he seems not to admit any alternative to his statement.

### Lambruschini's work

For convenience and clarity we will divide Lambruschini's “immaculate” activities into several sections:

#### a) Pastoral Activities

Lambruschini supported the devotional and liturgical initiatives that arose in his time in honor of the Immaculate. He was the first in Rome to make known and to spread the Miraculous Medal of St. Catherine Labouré.

He patronized, with Gregory XVI, the practice of the living Rosary, founded in Avignon in honor of the Immaculate.

One element of his pastoral program was the education of the faithful to a fervent Marian piety of the “Immaculate.” It is witnessed by an indulto in 1846 which, to mitigate the rigor of Lent, suggests “at least to pay a visit to the shrine of St. Maria of Farfa... There, prostrated at the feet of the great Virgin Mary, after you rejoice with her for her Immaculate Conception, which for a most singular privilege, among all human creatures to her alone (it was) granted, therefore she did not contract even the slightest shadow of the original sin, beg her to be and to show to be our common mother...”

#### b) Study activity.

Lambruschini's most valuable contribution to the “Immaculate” movement is the publication of the *Dissertazione polemica sull'Immacolato Concepimento* (1843).

Interpreter of a stir caused by this work in the Catholic world, became the publisher Giuseppe Battaglia, as he presented in Veneto, in 1844, the first edition: “The work we have honor to reproduce had already, at its the first appearance, a rapid development on both sides of the Alps. The newspapers friends of religion were quick to make its value known; the good people of all countries were willing to spread it; and soon the foreign languages, taking the place of ours, made its reading common for all Catholic nations.”

This great favorable reception of the work is justified both by historical circumstances and, above all, by the prominent place occupied by the author in the Church hierarchy – he was then the Secretary of State. The *Dissertazione* - Bonnetain writes - "... represents the culmination of countless petitions and postulations that in recent years had multiplied" to promote the proclamation of the dogma. Actually a look at the amount of responses to the call by Pope Pius IX in his encyclical *Ubi primum* (1842) confirms the impression that Lambruschini's *Dissertazione polemica* was faithfully interpreting the wishes of the Catholic world; his work was in fact considered as the one that had aroused the attention of the people, had touched the hearts of readers and knocked down the last resistance.

"Cardinal Lambruschini - Bonnetain writes - opens the method that will preside over the work (of the pre-preparation Commission): reason of convenience, Scripture, tradition in all its forms, up to the most recent."

In fact, all the theologians of the various commissions had in their hands Lambruschini's work. For some it constituted the outline for the casting of their votes. With confidence they trusted his conclusions, especially in the study of the tradition and the exposition of the thinking of the great theologians.

*c) President of the pre-preparation commission*

Gregory XVI, in spite of all the support he had given to every initiative in honor of the Immaculate Conception, was unable to bring it to its conclusion, as he wished and wanted, with a solemn proclamation of the dogma. He especially feared to render the Holy See hateful to the nations such as the UK, Germany and Ireland, which had not submitted any petition. Pope Gregory XVI died on June 1, 1846, leaving to his successor the heredity and the honor of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

The conclave of 1846 elected Cardinal Mastai Ferretti, who was preferred, after several attempts in favor of Cardinal Lambruschini. We know that the reason for the change of direction was only a political one.

The hardships that marked the beginning of the pontificate of Pius IX, especially related to his condescending attitude toward liberal ideas, did not divert the mind of the pope from the idea of glorifying the Virgin Mary, indeed perhaps they hastened the process of the preparation. On December 6, 1848, in fact, he appointed a congregation of cardinals, presided by Cardinal Lambruschini, who assumed the role of a pre-preparation commission to work on the definability of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Lambruschini's appointment is all the more remarkable when you consider the differences in nature between his politics and the one of Pius IX, which once again confirms the leading role he played in the definition of the dogma, which he "suggested, recommended and inculcated".

This role has been recognized several times by the pope, as we know from Cardinal Bilio who related the personal conversations he had with the pontiff, and from Father General Fioretti and various scholars who have addressed this problem.

It is worth to report, one for all, an episode recounted by a cardinal contemporary of ours. Pius IX was already in Gaeta, "seated on a terrace, absorbed to consider, with sadness, the glittering waves of the Mediterranean and thinking about the storms that were to hit again the boat of which he was the helmsman." Lambruschini "then turned to the pope, so absorbed, these memorable words: 'Holy Father, your holiness will not heal the world and will not set it on its axis, but proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception,' and



added: ‘This will restore the sense of doctrinal definition of the Christian truth and pull the spirits away from the materialistic deviations we are facing’.”

This suggestion is characteristic and typical of Lambruschini’s personality, and it is also found in the letter of response to the encyclical *Ubi primum* and in the closing of the *Dissertazione*.

Then, one day, speaking with the superior of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, Pius IX, alluding to the dogmatic definition, said: “All credit for that definition, to tell the truth, belongs to the poor Cardinal Lambruschini, who was pushing a lot for it.”

Lambruschini’s first act, when installed in his new office, was to suggest to the Pope the names of the cardinals members of the commission, and made him add also a group of five consultants. December 22 opened the series of meetings, which took place in our house of Caravaggio in Naples, Lambruschini’s residence, and it was decided to review all over the problem. Two were the issues to be addressed:

I. If, following the request of the majority of the Catholic episcopate... should the pope be advised to provide for the promulgation of the singular privilege of the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, and if so:

II. In what manner, in the present circumstances, the pope will proceed to the promulgation, which is mentioned in the first question. Unanimity was reached, after five hours of discussion, with respect to the first point, while various delays and obstacles intervened for a timely decision concerning the second point.

Lambruschini, thanks to his ardent faith and sure of his theological criterion, relaying on the sense of the universal faith, broke any delay and confusion, and as a result, following his wise observations and proposals, these conclusions were reached:

- “to advise the pope to send a encyclical to all the bishops, indicating the prayers to be done all over the world, before the definition, and inviting all the bishops to express their opinion and that of their faithful, concerning the definability of the Immaculate Conception;

- to assign the draft of the encyclical to Cardinal Orioli, who accepted on condition that he could count on Lambruschini’s help, and to entrust the drafting of the themes of the encyclical to the five consultants.” Once the work of the consultants was presented, the preparation of the draft of the encyclical fell only upon Lambruschini, because in the meantime Cardinal Orioli had become ill.

On 2 February 1849, the pope emanated from Gaeta the encyclical *Ubi primum*, which marked a significant step forward in the preparation of the definition and was considered almost as an ecumenical council in writing, which committed the bishops to decide and answer a great question proposed to them. Among the responses that immediately were received by the Holy See, the first was from the same Lambruschini, bishop of Porto, which bears the date of March 29, 1849.

## “DEATH IS NEAR”

New political events intervened to slow the course of the work. The pope had meanwhile returned to Rome, followed by the cardinals, and had begun to deal vigorously with the task he had taken on. On September 20, 1850 he appointed new consultants. On May 8, 1852 he instituted a special committee of seven theologians, with the task of examining further the matter.

At the conclusion of these studies, topics were compiled that could serve for the dogmatic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*. Meanwhile on August 2, 1853 the theological commission, at the end of its work, expressed full support for the definition.

Not yet satisfied with all these consultations, the pope, so that the solution of the problem would be entirely justified and comprehensive, on March 22, 1854 established a new 21 members congregation of cardinals, including Lambruschini.

But the uninterrupted activity, the infirmities of age, the shock caused by the recent political events, made it impossible for him this additional work. Returning to Naples, he often repeated: "Death is near me." And death came, not sudden, in the early hours of Thursday, May 12, 1854, in Porto, where he had gone on May 9 and where on the 11 of the same month he had been seized with a fit of apoplexy. His great desire: the proclamation of the dogma, that would have been for him the "*Nunc dimittis*," became a reality seven months later, on December 8, 1854.

## THE PASSION FOR THE CHURCH

We present, as a conclusion, the testimonies of some people who knew well Lambruschini as they were in contact with him.

Of Pope Gregory XVI we remember the words he expressed in the consistory of September 30, 1831, when he awarded him the red hat, and which are a summary of his activities in the service of the Church.

Son of a prominent religious family, from which, in our time, have come two great men who have been the Cardinals Gerdil and Fontana; known for his intelligence, the integrity of his life and the science of his sacred studies, he was appointed consultor to the Supreme Inquisition (the Holy Office) and examiner of bishops. Later he became secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, and the skill with which he conducted his office aroused in all a great expectations.

As his fame kept growing day by day, he was created archbishop of Genoa, with universal consensus (1819-1826). Even in the development of this new activity, he did not fail to manifest the treasures of his high mercy, doctrine, pastoral zeal, untiring care for the good of the flock. In fact he practiced so well the mission as the archbishop of Genoa, that even our interests and those of the Apostolic See were always treated with the utmost fidelity and equal diligence.

Our predecessor Leo XIII, in the light of this and judging him up to the task, appointed him Apostolic Delegate of the Apostolic See at the Christian King (of France: 1826-1831). The events took it upon themselves to prove how clever was the choice of the prudent pontiff.

Of the same Gregory XVI is known the praise addressed to Lambruschini, who was his Secretary of State (1836-46):

Outstanding for the glory of great virtues and many illustrious events, with so much praise of his name, with such faith, religion, piety, integrity, prudence and doctrine, he never ceases to offer his work to us and to the Chair of Saint Peter; and indeed for such abundance (abundance) greatly deserved to us and to this Apostolic See and to the Christian and civil republic.

Finally the judgment of a contemporary, that perhaps had already felt the need to place himself only in the perspective of the service of the Church, to give a complete as possible appreciation of Lambruschini: "Lambruschini is somehow under the dominion of a

real passion for the Church and the Holy See, to which he devoted all his life; so, to appreciate him, we have to place ourselves outside of our opinions and judge him from the point of view of his dedication to the immutable principles of the Church. Then we could bring out his strong, worthy, noble, loyal character, his ability in business and his apostolic zeal.”